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## PRINCE VON BISMARCK—II.

BY EMILIO CASTELAR.

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### V.

“WE have thirty-four kings,” said Heine, “and we all call fatherland those kingdoms which belong to them by divine right.” To simplify this almost feudal régime by reducing to a common denominator these various fractions, and building up, if not a single state, at least one which should become predominant and constitute itself the guiding star of the group, what a splendid task for a statesman of Bismarck’s courage and power! To this task he devoted himself, and then followed the most brilliant period of his life and history, that dating from his preparations for war with Austria and coming down to the time when he was making ready for the inevitable conflict with France. I know of no greater prodigy of skill than that then displayed by him. The rout of the Austrians was indeed a portentous event in Bismarck’s career, following, as it did, so closely after he had been grievously defeated in the popular branch of Parliament, where he was supported by but thirty-six deputies—a miserable fraction better adapted to follow a petty political chieftain than a leader such as he.

However, having induced Austria to associate herself with him in his design for the seizure of the Danish duchies, he assumed a feigned humility toward that power as long as the work was in progress, but once completed and when he found himself no longer in need of assistance, he turned upon his quondam ally with fierce arrogance and dealt her a well-nigh fatal wound.

He had a thorough contempt for the idea, at that time prevalent in Germany, that a war between the two great branches of the German people would be little better

than fratricidal. He did not hurry the preparations for his enterprise; in fact, he spent five years in perfecting his plans, but no sooner were they fully matured than he struck at his enemy with lightning-like rapidity. The war lasted but a few days, and a single battle sufficed to decide the contest between Prussia and Austria. So brilliant and startling was the victory which crowned Bismarck's work—the expulsion from the Germanic confederation of the ancient and imperial protector of the Teutonic peoples, a work undertaken in opposition to everybody's advice and carried to a successful conclusion in spite of every obstacle—that the achievement will ever live in human annals as an example of what can be accomplished by a tenacious will; above all, when this has for its object the realization of a fecund and progressive ideal.

Such a stupendous feat cannot be judged from outside—from the standpoint of the anatomic cabinet of an impassive historian who coldly studies a cold skeleton. Such a critic having no relations with real personalities, is incapable of understanding the creations of others, and neither reflection nor study will ever enable him to appreciate and comprehend Bismarck. It is owing precisely to this, that the opinions of so celebrated a writer as Taine carry so little weight, as they are simply formulated by a professor for those who, comfortably seated by their library fire-side, give themselves over to the study of personages long since dead—the protagonists of ancient history, entities who at one time lived in the cosmic fires of revolution or took part in the apocalyptic battles of empire. Who can form an idea of the living lion of the desert by studying the desiccated lion of the museum? Vico, formulating historical judgment, says: "We can only know that which we have caused; so God, who is the great cause of all things, knows all things." I would add to this, that we know only through suffering; hence everyone who has revealed something to us is a martyr, and all redemption comes to us through the immolation of a redeemer. Only those who planned and succeeded in accomplishing Italian unity, as did Cavour or Ratazzi, or who, like Mazzini or Crispi, conspired for half a century, or who, like Garibaldi, destroyed absolutism; or who, like Lincoln, emancipated the slaves—only these can realize what it must have cost to establish German unity on the foundations of a defeated Austria, surrounded and but-

tressed as the latter was in her historic fortress by arms and superstitions eager to rush to her defence. The battle of Sadowa was simply the final consequence in logical sequence of religious reform; of the Treaty of Westphalia; of the philosophic and political movement initiated by Frederick the Great; of those two revolutions whose forces Prussia combated and in the end accepted; of the universal French Revolution of 1789; and, finally, of the German National Revolution of 1848. Bismarck might well feel satisfied with his work.

## VI.

I have said that Bismarck's work was founded upon contradictions or antinomies. From the time of his access to power to the time of his triumph over Austria, these contradictions, like the antinomies of Hegel, are reconcilable only in synthesis; while, from the hour of victory over Austria to the time of his fall from power, they are as irreconcilable as are the antinomies of Kant. The great philosopher, upon seeing the destruction, as he supposed, of the cardinal principle upon which the universe is founded, namely, pure reason, formulated his theory of practical reason, and thus found a way out of his difficulties; but Bismarck was not so fortunate, for, after Sadowa, whether in his domestic or foreign policy, he did nothing but entangle and involve himself more and more each day, wandering, as it were, within the limits of an immense and continual contradiction.

The unity of his country having been established by the Treaty of Prague, it might reasonably have been supposed that a secure foundation had been laid for progress, and that no obstacles would henceforth be put in its path. Dominated, however, by that spirit of contradiction, as strong within him as it was in that German of the Germans, Robert the Devil, he showed himself to be under the influence of two contrary forces of which he was the product, and he proceeded to put the seal of reaction on his own work. The unity of Germany, accomplished with the aid or at least with the acquiescence of the French, it was not to be supposed that Italy and Prussia should become aggrandized by the initiative of France while the latter was to be confined strictly to her own limits. Irreducible antinomies—either France must be strengthened without detriment to Germany, or Germany must retain what she had gained, without, however, becoming an

offence or a danger to France. Bismarck proposed to gather into one group, and form into a union, the South German States; this union to bind itself not to pass beyond the limits of the Main and to engage to incorporate its army with that of the North. Prussia was to be the tutelar genius of the whole. She was to proclaim universal suffrage and would compel the feudalists themselves to support it. Then Bismarck proposed to have Prussia continue ancient feudalism by establishing it upon the waves of this same universal suffrage, building a castle as it were in the ocean. He proposed all this, and further, to impose upon so progressive and democratic a State as United Germany, the forms and processes of the conquerors and of the conquest; to divert Austrian ambitions toward the Slavonic races of the South, and thus embroil her with Russia, who had similar ambitions herself; to reconcile a king of so-called divine origin and of absolutist tendency with a parliament modeled upon that of Great Britain; subsidize socialism and formulate laws for it, and then declare a state of siege against the socialists; seek for religious peace and at the same time promulgate the Cæsar-like May laws of 1873 against the Catholic clergy. All this he proposed to himself, and then in his infatuation he attempts, in alliance with Dr. Döllinger and the Old Catholics, to form a new church, only to find himself shortly afterwards going humbly to Canossa to sue for pardon, offering in consideration the revocation of the May laws.

We next find him threatening the Papacy and treating it with terrible irreverence, which does not prevent him, however, from submitting to Papal arbitration and bowing to the Pope's decision in the colonial disputes between Spain and Germany; then we see him seeking to wound Russia by vetoing the Treaty of San Stefano, and to favor England and Austria by handing over to the one the Island of Cyprus and to the other Bosnia, without its ever occurring to him that Russia might seek to retaliate by entering into a close alliance with France. We have him seizing Metz and Strasburg under the pretence that this would conduce to preserve European peace; and he who sought to destroy Austria is found declaring that that power's existence is indispensable for the safety of Germany, and that she is providential in history as the protector of the incipient States of the Danube. Subsequently he plans and forms the Triple Alliance for the sake, he tells us, of European stability, and he compels the

partners to arm themselves to the teeth, thus ruining Italy and drawing from Germany the last drop of sweat for the purpose of filling the voracious coffers of the army chest. He foments the hereditary principle by putting kings before all human institutions; but he has no scruple in embittering the last hours of the Emperor Frederick, and he turns angrily from the latter toward William II., in whom he sees nothing but a simple pupil to be managed as a puppet; only, however, to find in him a master who was soon to show that he, Bismarck, was not the Alpha and Omega of all created things. To the youthful Emperor was reserved the task of solving the great Chancellor's many contradictions by simply suppressing, as a useless cipher, the contradictor himself, and sending him into retirement.

In the midst of so many contradictions in the great statesman's character there are three which stand out prominently—one is displayed in his domestic policy, a second in his foreign policy and a third in his treatment of questions affecting one and the other. The contradiction in the first of these may be seen in his treatment of German socialism, while that in his foreign policy is exemplified in his dealings with Russia; the third of these contradictions being shown in his treatment of Rome.

To a statesman devoid of such contradictions, it would never occur to combat liberal political economy as out of fashion; to be in continual conference with Lasalle and seek to associate the latter with his work; to conceive German royalty as a patriarchate founded for the benefit of the poor; to pile law upon law and regulation upon regulation with no other result than to add to the fiscal estimates a burden of taxation and a load of misery, and to punish with violence and by useless measures the inevitable awakening from illusions which he himself had propagated and fomented.

Still more glaring was the Bismarckian contradiction as seen in the Chancellor's relations with Russia.

Some time ago I said in one of my Parliamentary speeches, that from about the year 1850 to 1859 there were premonitions of war between France and Austria; from the year 1859 to 1866 of war between Austria and Prussia; from 1866 to 1870 of war between Prussia and France, and from 1870 to 1877 of war between Russia and Turkey, just as from the time of the Treaty of Berlin to the present day there have been threats of war between Rus-

sia and Germany. Smiles of incredulity greeted this declaration, which, however, is based upon the most commonplace prevision.

Never were two dynasties more closely bound together than the imperial houses of Germany and Russia; and on the other hand, never was there a more implacable hatred than that existing between the Russian and German peoples. One has but to look at the princes of the Muscovite dynasty to see, at a glance, how close is the consanguinity between them and the princes of the German imperial family; in a word, they are all Germans. But on the other hand, one need but look at a Russian and a German, to see that the former has been grafted from the full Tartar to the Slavonic stock, while the latter is of the pure Aryan root. The Russian princes have maintained such an affection for the fatherland from which they sprang that for a long time the ruling ministers of state, the court chamberlains and the officers of the household guard were compelled by necessity to use the tongue spoken between the Rhine and the Vistula, or they had to belong, through some branch of their families, to the Teutonic stock. Under these circumstances, the Germans saw in themselves, as it were, a conquering and official race—the rulers of a conquered and servile empire. So dominant, in fact, was this Germanic influence that the Emperor Nicholas had for his Chancellor (that is to say during our own times), a man who could neither speak nor understand the Russian language. German blood, diffused by great Empresses through the race of the Romanoffs, became still more common by reason of the custom deeply ingrained in the latter, of allying themselves with German princesses, who exercised so powerful a social influence that they were able to secure the adoption of laws eminently favorable to the condition of woman, thus giving a token and sign of their unquestioned superiority. And these princesses, so manifestly superior, educated as they had been in cities which were the very focus of science and poetry (especially in the last century), brought to the throne of the Czars, together with the nostalgia of a fatherland, the firm resolution to rear and educate their offspring in a love for that Germany which was so dear to them. While the Russian dynasty, therefore, entertains for Germany an honest and honorable friendship, the Russian people, on their side, feel for that country nothing but implacable hatred. In their pride, common to all nations which have a long life before them and but a short history to

look back upon, they detest the people to whom they owe what little culture they possess. The pure Muscovites, the guardians of the national thought, believe that the blending of the Slavonic and the Tartar races represents a purer blood than that of the Teuton, just as the Teuton in the beginning of modern history believed that the old tree of the Latin Empire and the Latin race could only renew its life by the pure sap injected into it by the tribes wandering on the foggy plains of the north.

The Russians have an abiding faith in the superiority of that civilization which was originally represented by cities purely Muscovite, like holy Moscow; defended by heroes like Ivan the Terrible, and consecrated by such a church as the Orthodox, which unites the genius of Europe with the genius of Asia; and this faith in their peculiar civilization is strengthened by the illusions common to a love of country, thus forming, as it were, a magnificent monument erected by a race which believes itself to be the elect of heaven and to be predestined to a brilliant future. This marvellous work of history found itself, at the time of Peter the Great, interrupted and almost smothered beneath the vast pile of documents heaped upon it by German bureaucracy, and as a result Moscow fell, the holy Synod expired, Russian originality became extinct, the patriarchal empire was converted into an autocracy, the militant church became a bureau, the free and original life of the Slav and Cossack, who had found themselves providentially united on the boundless steppes for the purpose of saving and regenerating the world, became simply a German parody. Such was the Muscovite idea, and it went still further—the Russian believed that, in like manner as the civil law of Rome sought to found a race superior to any which had previously existed—a race which should be purer in sentiment, nearer to nature and better fitted for liberty; so the social problem of the modern world required a race like the Slavonic, the only one capable of facing and solving it; and the solution was to come through free and ample municipal government as patriarchal as that enjoyed by the Asiatic tribes and as progressive as that of any European state. Animated by such sentiments as these, the patriotic Russian hated to see his Czar—already too absolute—adopt the despotism of the German; he hated to see the Synod—already too official—assume the form of German bureaucracy; and to see in the staff of the army the German officers supreme.



St. Petersburg, to him, represented nothing but the city of the conquerors; and in all modern life, from the time of Peter the Great to the present day, he simply sees a vile parody of the customs and institutions which, according to his ideas, have made the Western nations thoroughly adapted for war and conquest, but have totally unfitted them for natural liberty and political progress.

Statesmen, bureaucrats and military men are accustomed to forming their combinations without ever giving a thought to the poet who gives his country a poem, to the publicist who writes a pamphlet, or to the historian who records a deed. They resemble the husbandman who sows the seed without knowing what inclemencies or what favors heaven has in store for his crops, or whence came the cloud which watered or the hail storm which destroyed his beloved fields. That strophe of the poet, that word of the orator and that idea of the philosopher—all these are lost sight of in the whirlwind of practical politics, the most impure of all the impurities contained in this living reality; but still they take possession of the people in some mysterious way, just as the living germs of certain plants are carried by the wind and fall with vivifying force upon other plants far distant; and they awake sentiments heretofore dormant, but now springing to life and setting in motion the greatest and loftiest enterprises.

Hence, while Emperors and Chancellors sought to form a close alliance with Germany, the Russian people cursed the project; and here again Bismarck made the mistake of supposing that the court could vanquish the people, but that the people could never vanquish the court. As a matter of fact, the Russian people have recently triumphed over the court; and, strangely enough, they have been assisted in their work by two very opposite forces—by the Nihilists, who some years ago assassinated the Czar, and by his successor, who brought to the throne a character and principles of a distinctly Muscovite type. Thus it is that Germany finds herself between the Russian and the French, or, as one might say, between the hammer and the anvil.

A like perplexity and uncertainty plagued Bismarck in his treatment of the Catholic question. In 1873, after a furious combat with the church, supposing that he could suppress Catholicism by a *coup d'état*, he attempted to subject the very soul of the people to coercive laws; but, ten years later on,

we find him rising in the German legislature to declare that the State was powerless to oppose ideas, hence that all measures adopted for and aimed at the conscience must necessarily prove abortive. And the same thing which happened to him in the ecclesiastical question arising out of the May laws, befell him in the military question arising out of the conquest of Alsace and Lorraine. Bismarck's profound genius enabled him to quickly understand what a grave mistake it was to retain Metz and Strasburg, the two cities beloved beyond all others by France, and loving her beyond all else in return. But he permitted an oligarchy of victorious generals to impose their own and the national will upon him; and, failing in sufficient resolution to oppose them, he proceeded to devour the bitter fruit of moral defeat. As long as Alsace and Lorraine are retained from France, Europe will know no peace; and as restoration to their nationality is but an act of simple justice, these provinces will some day be returned to their rightful owner; notwithstanding the regrettable weakness displayed by the Chancellor in his attitude toward German military leaders.

Bismarck committed a similar error in his colonial policy. How many shameful defeats he sustained in his ambitious designs to make Germany a colonial power! After having moved heaven and earth to acquire territories on the Dark Continent, he found himself compelled to exchange an empire in Zanzibar for an insignificant islet in the German Ocean.

His experience was similar in regard to his personal power, so tenaciously and persistently defended by him against all and everything. He championed the old principle of the imperial will as the basis of the State and as the foundation of the law, regarding the legislature as simply a consulting body. He made the Kaisers his gods and he flattered them to such an extent that he was able to induce them to seize the crown from the altar and place it upon their own heads as though by divine right. But there came a day when imperial power, in order to assert its assumed divinity and omnipotence, sacrificed upon its altars no less a victim than the Chancellor himself.

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